

Rep. Baird Continues Work to Protect Washington's Salmon Industry (June 14, 2007)

Washington, D.C. - Continuing his ongoing efforts to protect the Washington salmon industry and save Washingtonians money, Congressman Brian Baird (WA-03), sent the following letter yesterday to the Army Corps of Engineers commending them for working to reduce avian predation of juvenile salmonids in the Columbia River Estuary.

“Salmon are vital to our region’s economy, environment, and culture,” said Congressman Baird. “Current efforts to protect and preserve salmon cost billions of dollars each year, and yet we’re not seeing enough of a return on this investment because Caspian terns are killing the fish. This just doesn’t make sense. Through this authorization, the Corps can now take steps to protect both the terms and the fish.”

The prevalence of Caspian terns in the Columbia River estuary has led to increased predation of threatened and endangered Columbia River salmon and steelhead. It has been estimated that Caspian terns consume approximately 10 to 19 percent of the annual out-migrating population of juvenile salmonids originating from the Columbia Basin.

In January 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Corps of Engineers, and NOAA Fisheries completed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Caspian tern management to reduce the number of young salmon eaten by terns in the Columbia River estuary. The plan calls for redistributing the world’s largest breeding colony of Caspian terns over a wider area and decreasing their numbers on East Sand Island near the mouth of the Columbia River. Aimed at reducing the number of young salmon eaten by terns, the plan also will benefit the terns by dispersing a large breeding concentration where the population is vulnerable to disease, human disturbance, predation and storms.

The plan, once implemented, would substantially improve survival of juvenile Columbia River salmonids through the estuary, according to Corps biologists. At full implementation, an estimated 2.4 million to 3.1 million additional juvenile salmonids annually would survive their passage through the estuary. Snake River and Upper, Middle, and Lower Columbia River steelhead would benefit most from the proposed action. Other listed and non-listed Columbia River salmonids also are expected to benefit from the action.

Congressman Baird has led the effort to bring federal funding to Southwest Washington for salmon recovery efforts and consistently supports measures to protect this vital part of the economy.

A copy of the letter follows:

John Paul Woodley, Jr.

Assistant Secretary of the Army

United States Department of Defense

Room 3E446

Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20310-0108

Dear Secretary Woodley:

I write today commending you and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers for your recent legal review which found that the Corp of Engineers has discretionary authority to implement management actions to reduce the avian predation of juvenile salmonids in the Columbia River Estuary.

As you know, the prevalence of Caspian terns in the Columbia River estuary has led to increased predation of threatened and endangered Columbia River salmon and steelhead. The effect of Caspian terns on endangered fish is clear; as your legal opinion notes, it has been estimated that Caspian terns consume approximately 10% to 19% of the annual out-migrating population of juvenile salmonids originating from the Columbia Basin.

Uncertainty has existed within the Portland District of the Corp of Engineers as to whether sufficient authority exists to carry out the actions needed to address avian predation. For that reason, I am pleased to learn that the Army Corp of Engineers has now determined that the Secretary of the Army has discretionary authority under Section 906 (b)(1) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986.

I am also continuing to lead the effort to increase the authorized funding limit to carry out management actions. At the same time, while I thank and praise you for this recent legal finding, I strongly urge the Corp of Engineers to not delay in exercising this authority to research and implement actions to reduce avian predation of juvenile salmonids.

Once again, I commend you on this recent decision and look forward to seeing action taken by the Corp of Engineers to address the devastating affects of Caspian tern predation on endangered Columbia River salmon and steelhead.

Sincerely,

Brian Baird

Member of Congress

